



# The Holy See

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CANONIZATION OF OLIVER PLUNKETT

## **HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI**

*12 October 1975*

Dia's muire Dhíbh, a chlann Phádraig! Céad míle fáilte rómhaibh! Tá Naomh nua againn inniu: Comharba Phádraig, Olibhéar Naofa Ploinéad. (God and Mary be with you, family of Saint Patrick! A hundred thousand welcomes! We have a new Saint today: the successor of Saint Patrick, Saint Oliver Plunkett). Today, Venerable Brothers and dear sons and daughters, the Church celebrates the highest expression of love-the supreme measure of Christian and pastoral charity. Today, the Church rejoices with a great joy, because the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is reflected and manifested in a new Saint. And this new Saint is Oliver Plunkett, Bishop and Martyr-Oliver Plunkett, successor of Saint Patrick in the See of Armagh-Oliver Plunkett, glory of Ireland and Saint, today and for ever, of the Church of God, Oliver Plunkett is for all-for the entire world-an authentic and outstanding example of the love of Christ. And on our part we bow down today to venerate his sacred relics, just as on former occasions we have personally knelt in prayer and admiration at this shrine in Drogheda.

For the suffering undergone by Oliver Plunkett is another expression of the triumph and victory of Christ's grace. Like his Master, Oliver Plunkett surrendered his life willingly in sacrifice (Cfr. *Is.* 53, 7; *Io.* 10, 17). He laid it down out of love, and thereby freely associated himself in an intimate manner with the sufferings of Christ. Indeed, his dying words were: «Into thy hands, o Lord, I commend my spirit. Lord Jesus, receive my soul». The merits of the Lord's Passion, the power of his Cross, and the dynamism of his Resurrection are active and made manifest in the life of his Saint. We praise God-Father, Son and Holy Spirit-who gave the glorious gift of supernatural faith to Oliver Plunkett-a faith so strong that it filled him with the fortitude and courage necessary to face martyrdom with serenity, with joy and with forgiveness. Being put to death for the profession of his Catholic Faith, he was, in the expression of our predecessor Benedict XV, crowned with «martyrdom for the faith» (Cfr. Apostolic Brief of Beatification, 23 May 1920: AAS 12, 1920, p.

238).

And after the example of the King of Martyrs, there was no rancour in his heart. Moreover, he sealed by his death the same message and ministry of reconciliation (Cfr. 2 *Cor.* 5, 18. 20) that he had preached and performed during his life. In his pastoral activities, his exhortation had been one of pardon and peace. With men of violence he was indeed the advocate of justice and the friend of the oppressed, but he would not compromise with truth or condone violence: he would not substitute another gospel for the Gospel of peace. And his witness is alive today in the Church, as he insists with the Apostle Peter: «Never pay back one wrong with another» (1 *Petr.* 3, 9). O what a model of reconciliation: a sure guide for our day! Oliver Plunkett had understood with Saint Paul that «it was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation» (2 *Cor.* 5, 18). From Jesus himself he had learned to pray for his persecutors (Cfr. *Matth.* 5, 44) and with Jesus he could say: «Father, forgive them» (*Luc.* 23, 31).

In his speech on the scaffold, his words of pardon were in fact: «I do forgive all who had a hand directly or indirectly in my death and in my innocent blood». O what an example in particular for all those who have a special relationship with Oliver Plunkett, for all those whose life he shared! As an illustrious son of Ireland he is the honour and strength of the people who transmitted to him the Catholic Faith. In 1647 Oliver Plunkett, with five companions, was conducted to Rome by the well-known and revered Oratorian Peter Francis Scarampi; and for the next twenty-two years he remained in this City of Peter and Paul. As a student at the Irish College he is an example of fortitude and piety to the seminarians of today. For three years, after his ordination to the priesthood in 1654, Oliver Plunkett served as Chaplain with the Oratorians at S. Girolamo della Carità and visited the sick in the nearby Hospital of the Holy Spirit. As a minister of Jesus Christ and servant of fraternal love he is a pattern of zeal for his brother priests in the modern world. For twelve years he taught in the College of Propaganda Fide, and as an ecclesiastical professor he is a luminary of true supernatural wisdom to his colleagues today.

Oliver Plunkett was, above all, a Bishop of the Church of God, serving as Primate of Ireland for twelve years. He was a vigilant preacher of the Catholic Faith and champion of that pastoral charity which is fostered in prayer and manifested in solicitude for his brethren in the clergy—that pastoral charity which is expressed in zeal for the Christian instruction of the young, for the promotion of Catholic education, for the consolation of all God's people. Drawing strength from the inexhaustible fountain of grace, from the power of the Cross—which is itself eminently contained in the Eucharist, source of all the Church's power (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10), and in which the work of Redemption is renewed—he infused into his flock new strength and fresh hope in time of trial and need. Yes, Oliver Plunkett is a triumph of Christ's grace, a model of reconciliation for all, and a particular example for many—but Oliver Plunkett is also a teacher of the supreme values of Christianity. As the world enters the last quarter of the twentieth century and the concluding decades of this millennium, at a moment decisive for all Christian civilization, the testimony of Saint Oliver Plunkett proclaims to the world that the summit of wisdom and the «power of God» (1

*Cor.* 1, 18) is in the mystery of the Cross.

And the Church raises her voice in solemn affirmation, to authenticate and consecrate this testimony, and to reaffirm for this generation and for all time the true hierarchy of evangelical values in the world. The message of Oliver Plunkett offers a hope that is greater than the present life; it shows a love that is stronger than death. Through the action of the Holy Spirit may the whole Church experience his insights and his wisdom, and with him be able to hear the challenge that comes from Peter: «Put your trust in nothing but the grace that will be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed» (1 *Petr.* 1, 13). May the Church understand this as yet another call to renewal and holiness of life, knowing as she does that, by reason of the power of God, there is no limit to love's forbearance (Cfr. 1 *Cor.* 13, 7), and that even the sufferings of the present time cannot be compared with the glory that awaits us (Cfr. *Rom.* 8, 18). And so we exhort our dear sons and daughters of Ireland, saying with immense affection and love: «Remember your leaders, who preached the word of God to you, and as you reflect on the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday» (*Hebr.* 13, 7).

Let this then be an occasion on which the message of peace and reconciliation in truth and justice, and above all the message of love for one's neighbour, will be emblazoned in the minds and hearts of all the beloved Irish people-this message signed and sealed with a Martyr's blood, in imitation of his Master. May love be always in your hearts. And may Saint Oliver Plunkett be an inspiration to you all. And to the whole world we proclaim: «There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends» (*Jo.* 15, 13). This is what we have learned from the Lord, and with profound conviction we announce it to you. Venerable Brothers and dear sons and daughters: let us praise the Lord, for today and for ever Oliver Plunkett is a Saint of God!

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Nel momento in cui da questa Roma degli apostoli e dei martiri sale il primo e ufficiale tributo di venerazione al novello santo, non possiamo dimenticare che di Roma egli fu ospite dal 1647 al 1669: cioè da quando vi giunse, poco più che ventenne, al seguito del Padre Scarampi, fino alla sua nomina a Vescovo di Armagh e Primate d'Irlanda. In Roma compì gli studi, in Roma fu ordinato sacerdote, in Roma esercitò il ministero a favore degli ammalati di S. Spirito, in Roma insegnò teologia nel Collegio di «Propaganda Fide» e fu Consultore nella Curia Romana. La granitica formazione della sua personalità di pastore e di maestro trova qui la sua propedeutica, la sua maturazione, la sua fioritura: e perciò, mentre ne godiamo spiritualmente, affidiamo alla sua intercessione anche la nostra diletta città di Roma, e in particolare le schiere dei giovani che vi si preparano al sacerdozio, lieta e imprevedibile riserva dell'avvenire della Chiesa.

Le zèle pastoral de Saint Oliver Plunkett, canonisé en ce jour, est d'abord un exemple saisissant et entraînant pour tous ceux qui portent la charge de l'épiscopat! Mais tette cérémonie, si réconfortante, est également pour les fidèles un appel pressant à l'union autour de leurs Evêques, pour avancer dans la Foi et pour collaborer davantage à l'Evangelisation du monde d'aujourd'hui!

Que le Seigneur vous donne à tous cette grâce de choix!

La iglesia tiene desde hoy un nuevo modelo que imitar, un nuevo Santo. Se trata de Oliver Plunkett, un ejemplo sobre todo de solidez en la fe, por la que tanto hubo de sufrir, dejando un testimonio heroico de verdadero seguidor de Cristo. Ninguna dificultad, ningun esfuerzo, ningun sufrimiento fue capaz de doblegar la constancia intrépida de este hombre de Dios, que vivia de fe y que por ella todo soportaba. ¡Hermosa lección para el mundo de hoy!

Unser neuer heiliger, Oliver Plunkett, ist Bischof und Märtyrer. Durch seinen Martertod gab er seinen Verfolgern und der ganzen Welt das Zeugnis des Glaubens und der Liebe zu Christus. Denn durch die freiwillige Annahme des Todes um des Glaubens willen wird der Christ dem göttlichen Meister ähnlich, der durch seinen Opfertod das Heil der Welt gewirkt hat. Legen auch wir im persönlichen und öffentlichen Leben mutig Zeugnis ab für unseren Glauben und unsere Kirche.